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ABSTRACT

The five articles in this journal issue are intended for use by school administrators, and provide information on how to organize effective programs for achieving student writing competency. The first article discusses the development of New York State's Preliminary and Regents Competency Tests in Writing, analyzes sample student responses to one test, suggests ways of improving student writing, and lists topics related to achieving writing skills that need to be addressed. The second article describes the development of one school writing program, identifies myths about the teaching of writing, describes in concrete terms the roles of teachers and students in a writing program, and offers advice for establishing a similar program. The third article discusses how to prepare remedial students for essential writing competencies. The fourth article presents reasons for setting up a tutorial writing center, discusses the advantages of tutoring over regular classroom instruction, and describes how to train tutors. The final article analyzes the results of the Regents Competency Tests for students in one community, and concludes that teaching the mechanics of writing does not insure that students will be able to transfer the knowledge to the writing of entire compositions. (FL)

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Issue Editor, Robert W. Blake

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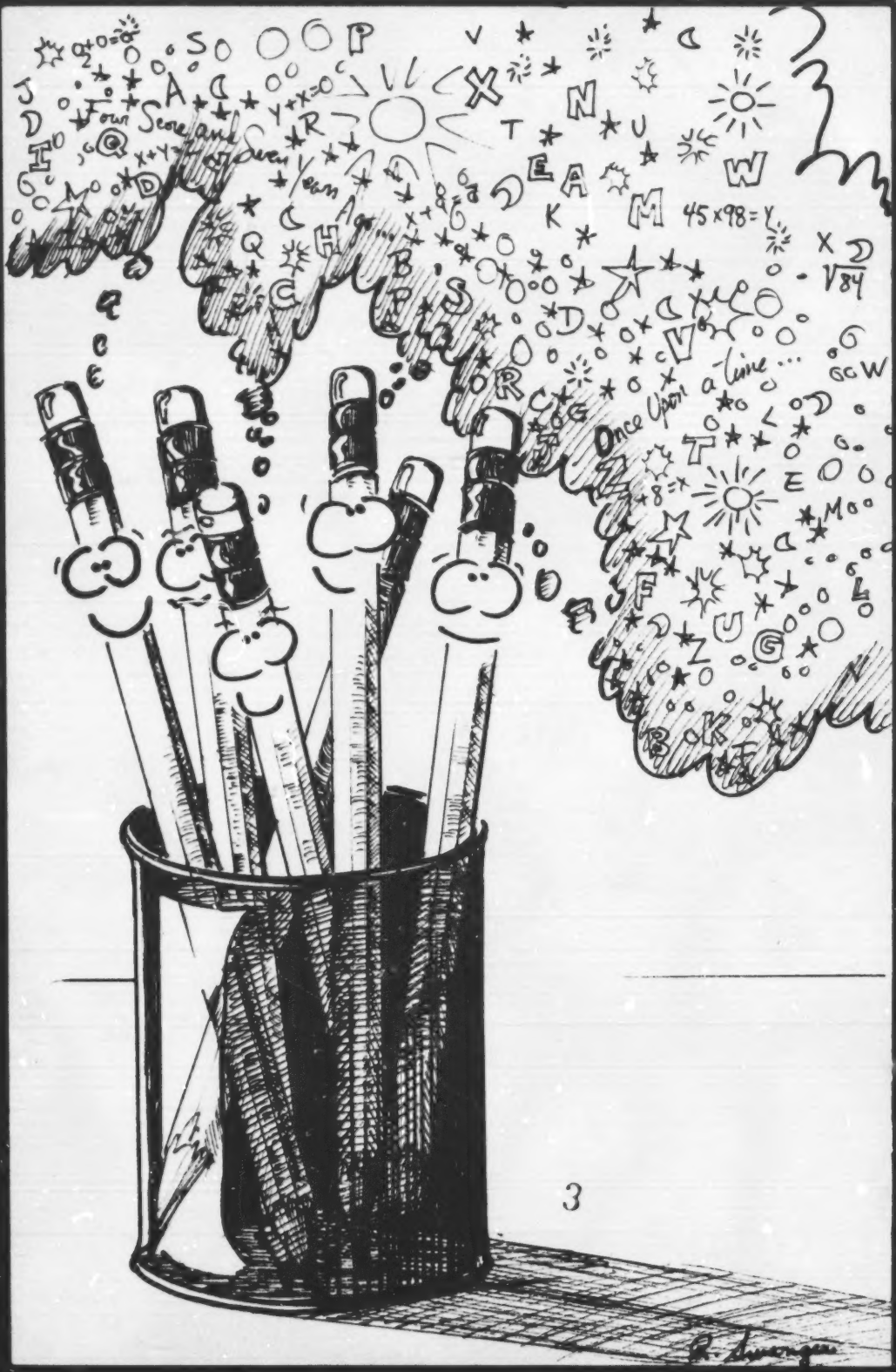
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ACHIEVING COMPETENCY IN WRITING

Robert W. Blake

No problem in our schools is more important than that of students achieving competency in writing. For this special issue, we have asked individuals especially knowledgeable about writing and teaching writing to create articles aimed directly at school administrators and supervisors dealing with topics such as these: recent research in writing and teaching writing, exemplary school programs, beneficial materials, and assessing and evaluating writing. We asked them to provide sound and practical information, written in a straightforward style and with a minimum of jargon, on how to organize effective programs in the schools for achieving student competency in writing.

Charles R. Chew, Chief of the Bureau of English Education of the New York State Education Department, is intimately associated with the design, administration, and evaluation of the Regents Competency Test in Writing. In his paper, "Competency Tests in Writing: A Plan in Progress," Chew explains the development of both the Preliminary and the Regents Competency Tests in Writing, analyzes sample student written responses to one test, offers suggestions for improving student writing as a result of his findings, and lists major topics related to achieving writing skills needing to be addressed in the future.

Dr. Robert W. Blake, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the State University of New York College at Brockport, has published articles on writing in several journals and is the author of a junior high school composition and language textbook, Language for Meaning 7 *(Houghton, Mifflin) and of a forthcoming companion text,* Language for Meaning 9.

Robert W. Blake, who has taught writing in schools and in colleges, recently directed a two-year study and inservice program for improving writing and the teaching of writing for an entire school system, grades K-12. Blake's piece, "Setting Up an Effective Writing Program in the Schools," is based on that experience and identifies harmful myths about teaching writing, describes in concrete terms the activities students and teachers perform in a successful writing program, offers advice for setting up a school writing program, and provides justification for helping students achieve competency in writing.

Nancy Munzert Rabianski, a former high school English teacher and English department chairperson, provides a tentative answer to the crucial question about how best to assist remedial students in gathering ideas before they tackle the first draft: Do remedial students gather a greater variety of more useful ideas before writing a first draft by a "free writing" method or by a

carefully structured program of prewriting? In her paper, "Preparing the Remedial Student for Essential Writing Competencies," Rabianski, on the basis of a study with high school students, reports that remedial students, who need a great deal of help with basic writing skills, profit more from gathering ideas by a carefully planned approach than they do by writing freely during the prewriting stage of the composing process.

Gladdys W. Church, director of a college learning center, offers reasons for setting up a tutorial writing place, discusses the advantages of tutoring over regular classroom instruction, and describes in detail how to train well-informed and understanding tutors to help students at all levels and with various writing problems achieve competency in writing.

Ms. Cecilia M. Kingston, Coordinator of English, K-12, for the Public Schools of the Tarrytowns, on the basis of a review of all Regents Competency Tests for eighth and ninth grade students who had been graded below 75 in her school district, gives reasons why such students, who could answer correctly questions about mechanics in Part I and could generate twenty sentences from words and phrases in Part II of the tests failed so dismally in writing effective paragraphs of no more than five sentences each. For Ms. Kingston, because we teach mechanics of writing, this doesn't mean that students will be able to transfer this knowledge to writing whole compositions.

NEW PRESIDENT APPOINTED

At its regular meeting on October 26, the NYS ASCD Executive Board accepted with regret the resignation of President Helen R. Gerhardt and appointed Marcia Knoll to the position for the unexpired term of office.

Although a number of other options were considered and discussed — including a special election and/or the redistribution among the members of the Executive Board of the duties and responsibilities of the President and President-Elect, it was the consensus that all of these were either highly impractical or significantly detrimental to the proper functioning of the organization.

Dr. Knoll will retain her position as President-Elect and will serve "her own year" as President during 1980-1981.

COMPETENCY TESTS IN WRITING: A PLAN IN PROGRESS

Charles R. Chew

Reports of students' inability to write bombard those on the educational scene from every possible source. We need only pick up issues of old or current periodicals to discover that Johnny cannot write or turn to the New York *Times* to discover that SAT scores have slipped once again and that an illiteracy problem troubles a significant number of our adult population.

The educator need not, however, turn to these illustrious sources of information; but rather, he or she needs only to talk to a classroom teacher at any grade level to understand that there is a problem in this particular skill area.

The move to Competency Testing has been suggested as one answer to this problem in many states, including our own. New York State now has a requirement that students must pass a certain competency test or a Regents examination in order to fulfill the high school diploma requirements. The Competency Test in Writing is one of the tests required and is discussed in the material which follows. Before that discussion begins, however, two terms need explication. The Preliminary Competency Test in Writing (PCT) is given at Grade 8 or Grade 9. The Regents Competency Test in Writing (RCT) is given for the first time in Grade 11. (A chart outlining the schedule for test administration follows later in this article.)

Dr. Charles R. Chew, Chief of the Bureau of English Education of the New York State Education Department, has over fifteen years experience as an English teacher and administrator in New Jersey and New York schools. He has published articles in such periodicals as Language Arts, Wisconsin English Journal, *and* The English Record *and is a frequent speaker at state and national professional conferences.*

The Competency Test in Writing—The Program

In New York State, students *must write* to pass the Competency Test in Writing. Unlike a number of tests which purport to test writing by having students make multiple choice selections, fill in blanks to complete sentences, and rearrange parts of discourse, students must write three separate pieces for this test. Students must write a business letter, a report, and a piece of persuasive discourse. Each writing task has a designated purpose and audience. Students must proofread, edit, and rewrite for a final copy. These essential elements of the writing test—preplanning, designating purpose and audience, and rewriting—are consistent with current discourse theory.

Although the writing competency test by itself does not constitute a complete writing program because not all discourse types are required, the test has validity in its attempt to actually assess students' writing.

A feature of this competency testing program in New York State is

TENTATIVE WRITING COMPETENCY TEST SCHEDULE FOR CLASSES AND INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

NAME OF TEST	BASIC COMPETENCY TEST				BCT DISCONTINUED	* PRELIM. COMP. TEST	** REGENTS COMPETENCY TEST														TEST REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION
DATE GIVEN	JAN 1980	JUNE 1980	AUG 1980	JAN 1981		FALL 1979	JAN 1980	JUNE 1980	AUG 1980	JAN 1981	JUNE 1981	AUG 1981	JAN 1982	JUNE 1982	AUG 1982	JAN 1983	JUNE 1983	AUG 1983	JAN 1984	JUNE 1984	AUG 1984	
GRAD. IN 1984						X			NO TEST WILL BE OFFERED							X	X	(X)	X	X	(X)	RCT, ACT, SAT, or Regents
GRAD. IN 1983						# X							X	X	(X)	X	X	(X)				RCT, ACT, SAT, or Regents
GRAD. IN 1982										X	X	(X)	X	X	(X)							RCT, ACT, SAT or Regents
GRAD. IN 1981							X	X		X	X	(X)	(See note at right)									6/81 and thereafter RCT, ACT, SAT, or Regents unless BCT passed before 2/1/79
GRAD. IN 1980	X	X	(X)	(X)																		Through 5/31/81 BCT, ACT, SAT or Regents Thereafter if graduation is delayed, RCT replaces BCT

(X) = Additional opportunities for students who wish to take advantage of them.

* = Form A will be used in 1979-80.

\# = Unless taken in grade 8

** = New forms of RCT are prepared for each administration.

ACT = American College Testing Program; SAT = Scholastic Aptitude Test

the fact that an early identification of students who may have deficiencies in writing skills is in place. For writing, a Preliminary Competency Test (PCT) which is similar in format to the RCT is administered in Grade 8 or Grade 9. Through an evaluation of a student's performance on the PCT and a diagnosis of the student's actual writing, instructional plans can be developed to help students achieve competency in writing. Plans are underway also to develop an instrument to identify students' writing skill deficiencies at an even earlier grade level.

The Board of Regents mandated that those students who fall below the state reference point on the PCT must be given remedial help prior to the time when it is necessary for them to take the RCT. Several safeguards for the students exist.

For each task of the RCT, there is a list of 25 topics from which a test item will be developed. Such a list permits instruction to focus on the following: prewriting, writing assignments in the various discourse modes with a designated purpose and audience, content, and rewriting.

The RCT can be taken a number of times beginning in January of the student's eleventh year. This means that a student can take the test in January, June, and August and take the examination in the same sequence in Grade 12, if necessary. By graduation, the students will have had a number of opportunities to take the examination; and a rather reliable indication of the student's performance in writing will have been established.

Not all students are required to take the RCT in order to receive a diploma, and this information is provided in the following chart which was prepared by James Crabtree, Associate in the Bureau of English Education.

The PCT—A Starting Point

The PCT can be a sound starting point for writing instruction, particularly if a careful analysis of the student's writing sample is the basis of this beginning.

In the *Preliminary Competency Test in Writing: Manual for Administrators and Teachers*, valuable help is provided for teachers in order to make this analysis. It should be noted that the student's writing process and writing samples must be analyzed. It is as important, if not more so, to know the student as a writer as well as the product which results from the writing. Instruction to help a student to improve must focus on both aspects of composing —process and product.

In assessing the process, the teacher must ascertain (1) the student's history as a writer, (2) the writing practice which has been had, (3) the prewriting experiences, and (4) the student's ability to attend to the demands of the writing task. As the teacher looks at the product, the writing sample should be analyzed in light of (1) the rhetorical task, (2) the relation of the parts to a unified whole, (3) word choice, (4) sentence syntax, (5) mechanics.

From these analyses, a plan of instruction can be developed to help the students' progress in the development of writing skills.

The Bureau of English Education sampled over 700 papers written for the PCT, and at the present time is analyzing and compiling the data

from this review. The Division of Educational Testing is analyzing the statistical data from the rating of the PCT which has been supplied by the school districts in the state. A comprehensive report of all this data will be forthcoming in a short time.

The limitations of this article do not permit a comprehensive view of students' performance on the PCT, but the highlights of just one person's review of one section of this test can, I believe, give some indication of the wealth of information which we are beginning to compile about students' writing. The possible significance of such material also becomes increasingly evident.

Certain observations can be made from analyzing a number of papers of a certain type. Although each written paper is uniquely different, specific observations can be made, some generalizations can be formed, and certain instructional strategies can be offered.

The following material relates the observations of John Vitiak, one reviewer. Mr. Vitiak reviewed the business letter responses written for the PCT during the summer.

90+ Papers

In these papers a number of errors reoccurred although most of them were minor. The list includes: minor indenting problems, the omission of a qualifier, the omission of a date. Generally speaking, the writers of papers in this range were quite competent and probably would only need a brief review of the business letter to eliminate minor problems.

80-89 Papers

Errors in these papers included common mechanical errors such as Dear Sirs, and Sincerely Yours (no comma). The date was often written 6/17/79. The papers in this range showed an excellent "know how" as related to business letter form.

75-79 Papers

The language used by students in this range was terse. The letters showed relatively little amenity as might be expected in such a letter. In addition, there seemed to be a "non-business" tone in many of these. The following quotations taken directly from the papers illustrate this point. "I was wondering if you could send me . . ." or "I have put a check in this letter for $6.50 . . ." The spacing of letter also seemed to present a problem for these writers.

70-74 Papers

The number of errors began to increase in this range. There was an increase in the number of spelling, organizational, and tone problems. The following errors seemed common to this group of papers—Dear Sir, Truely, Sincerly. Frequent omissions included: heading, signature, salutation, and a statement that remittance had been enclosed.

65-69 Papers

The frequency of errors increased sharply at this range as did the variety of errors. Many either left out important pieces of information or ordered incorrectly. Major errors in form appeared more frequently. Omissions included date, inside address, heading, closing, and signature. The papers suffered from apparent carelessness. Handwriting was often sloppy; margins were poor or non-existent.

60-64 Papers

In these papers, the frequency of mechanical errors increased rapidly. Many of them were in basic punctuation and spelling (Dear Sir, truly, sincerely). Sixty percent of the papers in this category contained major errors in acceptable business letter form. One third of these papers failed to completely follow the directions of the task. The physical appearance of these papers was poor. Handwriting was sloppy and difficult to read; margins were careless or totally non-existent.

50-59 Papers

The papers in this range abounded with errors in both form and technique and were similar to the basic kinds of errors cited in Mina Shaughnessy's book, *Errors and Expectations*.

The following are examples of some of the mechanical errors evident in these papers: Dear sir, Your's trully, Dear sir's, "I have look over your T shirts . . ." "I' encloses . . ." "Heres my adress . . ."

Acceptable business letter form seemed to be another problem area. Approximately 64% of the papers considered in this review contained major or minor errors in the letter form, and many papers exhibited a gross misunderstanding of the physical form of the letter, i.e., margins, indenting, skipping of spaces. Handwriting was poor. Twenty-five percent of these papers also used either an inappropriate and/or offensive tone.

0-49 Papers

Papers in this range were poor. Thirty percent of the papers showed that the writer failed to follow direction; however, in eighty-five percent, the basic information was found but was either garbled or awkward.

Errors again fell into the categories cited in *Errors and Expectations*, i.e., "I have just got done reading your artic . . ." or "I would like a Medium, in a man style for my friends birthday in a light blue with black print."

Sixty-four percent of the papers had either major or minor errors in acceptable business letter form; forty percent of the papers were grossly deficient in the use of punctuation and capitalization; thirty-five percent of the papers suffered from severe syntax problems; twenty-five percent, from severe spelling problems; forty percent had an inappropriate or an offensive tone; thirty percent of the papers evidenced that the student failed to follow directions.

Although the business letter is not a true discourse type, society requires us to write such letters. Although the business letter may be an easier task than the other two on the test, a careful diagnosis of students' responses yields information about needs and suggests instructional strategies.

Obviously, from the generalizations made from these papers, students need help with the rhetorical task. In a number of grade categories, there seems to be an inaccurate perception of the writing task; and students had difficulty in writing to the designated audience. This suggests that the teacher could focus instruction on these needs and much of this activity could take place within the framework of the regular classroom situation.

Even with the letter, it becomes obvious that students need help with

the organizational aspects of the written piece. The information needed to obtain the order needs organization, and work with students on organization can prove beneficial to other writing tasks of the test and whatever other writing assignments are given to the student.

The analysis of these papers shows weakness in syntax, word choice, and mechanics. Whatever possible, the best approach to overcome these problems would be through students' own writing.

The fact that becomes evident from a close look at any student's writing is that there is much to be learned which can help the students improve. Many of the strengths and weaknesses found in one sample of writing may be common to all. These can suggest to the teachers ways to manage instruction. Papers may reveal that a whole class needs help in a particular aspect of writing; therefore, a plan for large group instruction is required. Small group instruction or individual tutoring can correct other problems.

The Writing Program

An operational definition of writing and strong program ingredients must be the basis for any efforts made to improve students' writing within the school situation. The National Council of Teachers of English states these in "Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs," and this statement appears in the manual, *New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Writing: Manual for Administrators and Teachers.*

These guidelines indicate that a knowledge of current theory and research must underlie a program. Students must write in many forms, for many purposes, for different audiences, and in different subject areas. There must be support for the program by the teachers, parent and community groups, and by the overall school program itself. Evaluation must focus on the composing process, the written product, and the attitude of the writer.

The Work Ahead

Societal concerns, student performance, and a competency program have intensified the interest in writing skills in New York State. This intensified interest will require a supreme effort on everyone's part, and this effort may require any or all of the points listed below.

- Understanding of the writing process
- Involvement of the total community
- Analysis of the student as writer and the written product
- Tailoring instruction to needs
- Writing across the disciplines
- Attitude changes — teachers, students, community
- Action research within the classroom
- Improved communication at all levels

The challenge is monumental. Time will determine whether we are equal to it or not.

SETTING UP AN EFFECTIVE WRITING PROGRAM IN THE SCHOOLS

Robert W. Blake

What's the Problem?

Kids can't write. Everyone knows that. The National Assessment of Educational Progress tell us that. Articles in popular periodicals tell us that. College and high school English teachers tell us that. And assorted gurus on the educational scene tell us that.

But to make an intricate problem even more complex, most of what the "everyone" knows about writing and teaching writing just isn't so. Furthermore, to make the subject even more complicated, the half-truths "everyone" holds are frequently contradictory. So before we consider the features of a successful writing program, we should lay to rest some of the more persistent fictions about writing and teaching writing.

Myths About Writing and Teaching Writing

1. *Only a few especially gifted and talented people can write well.*

   Just not true.

   Everyone, except those who are physically and psychologically disabled, can learn how to write effectively. And the sooner we discount this myth the better we can proceed with the task at hand.

2. *You can't teach writing.*

   Nonsense.

   You can't, of course, teach the talent and perseverance it takes to become even a journeyman professional writer, but you can teach others the skills writers employ.

3. But. And here's a zinger.

   On the one hand, we hold the myth that you can't teach writing, *but anyone with a course in college composition, a few acceptable literary research papers under his or her belt, and a college degree can tell students what's wrong with their papers.*

   A dangerous and harmful assumption.

   Not anyone can teach writing, and no one should try without special training. Just as experienced writing teachers can do a lot of good, it deplorably follows that individuals uneducated in teaching writing can do a lot of harm.

4. *Writing is grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation and neatness.*

   A misleading half-truth.

   Sure, these elements are part of writing, but only a piece, and the writing teacher knows writers pay attention to such matters in the last stages of the writing process, when they edit final drafts. Teachers who equate "writing" with mechanical concerns confuse a low level part with the whole of the composing process. But more of this later.

5. *Writing is always a lonely, solitary pursuit.*

   This is what gives writing such a bad name.

   Teachers who operate from this assumption give writing assignments, have students write away from the class by themselves, "correct" first- or second-draft papers for me-

chanical errors outside school, and hand back the red-pencilled papers in class with little time spent on discussing how to make th drafts polished, finished pieces.

A frustrating and unfortunately not very productive business—for either teacher or student.

Again, more on this later.

6. *There's only one kind of worthwhile writing, at least for the schools, and that's expository writing.*

Another reason why writing has such a bad name.

Regrettably, most school and college teachers believe this myth. As if accomplished writers didn't intuitively employ myriad kinds of writing—description, narration, persuasion, and figurative writing—in their expository essays.

7. *Teaching writing is a simple business.*

A simplistic and harmful notion about teaching writing.

But I said before, didn't I, one of the myths was, "You can't teach writing." And now I say, "Teaching writing is a simple business." Illogical? Sure. Myths frequently are.

According to this myth, all you have to do is have students choose a topic, gather ideas, prepare a three-part outline with beginning, middle, and ending, turn in a first- or second-draft paper based on the notes and outline, and correct the mechanical errors.

Such a myth doesn't reflect except in the most superficial manner how writers turn out polished pieces. Nor does the notion take into account the characteristics of compositions as different, for instance, as the explanation of a process is from a persuasive essay aimed at a general audience.

8. *Teachers should grade all first- and second-draft papers after they proofread them for mechanical errors.*

Another perilous and self-defeating activity.

When they grade all drafts of papers, teachers who have confidence in this myth convey the mistaken idea that a first draft is all there is to writing.

Besides, when teachers grade all writing, they confuse two related but separate activities, *assessing* and *grading*. By assessing, I mean to make remarks, to give feedback—either orally in conferences or in writing on a paper—which suggests ways for improving a composition. With assessment, the intent is not to grade. When you stop to think about it, what writer would logically expect any drafts, except the last, to be judged? And by grading, as contrasted to assessing, I mean giving a grade. After students have revised and edited compositions, teachers may grade them. Or they can even wait until the end of a ten- or twenty-week marking period to assign grades for the student's progress during that period.

In other words, teachers—as well as students—should constantly assess each others' written compositions. And, since schools require grades periodically, teachers need to give grades, but they should grade only finished papers and report marks at the end of an instructional period.

9. *The writing teacher's major role is to correct mechanical errors in student papers.*

A misguided notion.

If writing teachers see their major function as rooting out mechanical errors in papers, illuminating the mistakes in red, and subtracting points from papers on the basis of these errors, whether they know it or not, they establish an adversary relationship between them and their students. When just the opposite should be the case.

Rather than being the person who "corrects," writing teachers should establish themselves as "trusted readers," as "writing coaches" who firmly but humanely prod and coax students to write better. And, incidently, the writing teachers, when they see themselves as "trusted readers," naturally create a classroom atmosphere in which students also become, not critical, sarcastic opponents of each other, but themselves become "trusted readers," individuals who are trained to encourage and give informed feedback to those serious about their writing.

What Makes an Effective Writing Program?

So, if we know how *not* to teach writing, the implication is apparent that we know how to teach writing. And it's true. We do know how to teach writing. We have available the results of study by first rate minds on the subject, useful materials, and the conclusions drawn from innovative research to give us helpful information for setting up writing programs in the schools.

But before we become too euphoric about our possibilities, some *caveats* are in order.

First, learning to teach writing—like learning to write itself—is a way of life. You can't learn how to teach writing by reading a book, by attending a one-day workshop, or by taking a crash course in "speed writing." Contrary to what many popularizers of teaching writing hold, there are no dazzling tricks in this business. Permanent, worthwhile ones, anyway. If you're going to be a writing teacher, you need to make some resolutions difficult to keep. You'll spend the rest of your life at it. You'll be refining skills until the day you expire. And you'll live by a set of convictions which will govern your every thought and action when you put pencil to paper.

Second, because writing is such an incredibly complex business, improvement in it is glacially slow. Teachers of writing know they will not see progress in their students' writing overnight. They are prepared to work for weeks and months and even years before they can see marked improvement.

Third, not only can writing be taught, it must be taught. We learn many skills outside the classroom, but, with few exceptions, writing is not one of them. Some vastly talented and breathtakingly motivated people appear to learn how to write by themselves, but even they are instructed by feedback from relatives, friends, and editors throughout most every stage of their writing. The point is that for the rest of us benighted creatures, we need a trained person to teach us how to write.

What Makes Up an Effective Writing Program?

If then you're willing to set up an effective writing program, what's the next step? How do we know when we come across a good program? How do students act in one? How do teachers behave? If we walked

into a classroom where students were writing well, what would be expect to find? Here, I submit, is what students and teachers should be doing.

Essentials for an Effective Writing Program

Students	*Teachers*
1. regularly write complete compositions—not canned exercises—on subjects they discover for themselves and about which they feel strongly (within guidelines set up by the teachers) to real audiences, sometimes including the teacher in those audiences.	1. regularly write themselves, sometimes on the topics they give their students, other times on subjects of their own choice, but the fact remains they write constantly. If they don't, they have no understanding of how to teach writing or the special problems their beginning writers will encounter.
2. write varied forms of discourse, including description, narration, persuasion, exposition, essays about literature, and poetry.	2. write varied forms of discourse.
3. spend considerable time in the classroom preparing for the first drafts by performing activities like these: thinking, remembering, asking and answering questions, contrasting, reading and taking notes, brainstorming, free-writing, writing dialogue, role playing and recording what happens, and playing with sentence structures.	3. set up activities in the classroom in which the students can gather a richness of material from which to write.
4. arrive at a focus—a discernible thesis—and a structure—no matter how simple at this stage—for a proposed piece of writing.	4. assist students in writing out their focus, thesis, or "lead"—as newspaper writers call it—and in outlining a simple structure for their planned piece.
5. display confidence in getting at the task of creating a first draft, with a minimum of frustration, without worrying about revising and editing at this stage.	5. encourage students to trust their instincts to write first drafts straight through.

Students	*Teachers*
6. regularly revise their first drafts by changing openings and endings, adding details, showing not telling, varying sentences, using precise words, and using transitional devices.	6. arrange for activities in the classroom in which students can learn how to revise.
7. regularly edit their revised compositions by proofreading and correcting mistakes in mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, standard usage, and conventional manuscript format.	7. allow for students to proofread in class their own and each others' revised compositions.
8. do exercises as a class in common problems with mechanics, such as standard usage or spelling, or individually do exercises as needed in mechanics.	8. diagnose problems students have in mechanics of writing and assign class exercises for common problems or activities as needed for individuals.
9. regularly interact with each other and with the teacher at all but the first draft stages of the writing process to receive immediate feedback from various audiences on how to improve their writing.	9. set up classroom situations with pairs of students, small groups of from four to five students and with the whole class so students can read their papers and get immediate feedback; teach students how to interact in groups; teach students how to ask useful questions aimed at helping them improve their writing.
10. act as "trusted readers" for their classmates, encouraging them in their writing but realistically identifying areas for improvement.	10. establish a classroom atmosphere in which each student, as well as the teacher, assumes the role of "trusted reader."
11. frequently bring their writings to final form by publishing them in school newspapers, literary magazines, or in dittoed booklets produced in classrooms.	11. provide opportunities for students to publish their finished writings.

Students	*Teachers*
12. read professional and student models of the same kind of writing they are producing to see how "other writers" solve the problems they are confronting.	12. have students read and analyze various professional and student writing models, not as literary critics, but as writers reading other writers' works.
13. expect to have their writing "assessed" at every stage; assume that their fellow students and teachers will give them immediate feedback on how to improve their writing drafts.	13. along with students in workshops, "assess" student writing at every stage by giving immediate feedback on how to improve the writing.
14. expect to be graded on their finished compositions—not on their successive drafts—expect to be given a grade for their improvement in writing over a marking period.	14. *do not* grade drafts of compositions; *do* grade final, finished pieces; and *do* grade for writing improvement over a marking period.
15. frequently produce writing which has not been assigned and expect their classmates to read and respond to it.	15. create a classroom atmosphere toward the value of effective writing which encourages students to write well independently of the teacher.

How To Get It Done

So you want to improve writing and the teaching of writing in your schools? Here, I believe, is what must be done.

1. *Get support from the top.* The evidence is clear from many sources that kids can't write. Therefore, it's not too hard to make a case for the need to improve writing and writing instruction in our schools. But to initiate any program, you must first get support from the top, from the school board and the superintendent. A few teachers can teach writing well in their individual classrooms, but to bring about change in a whole school, you must have the top administrator behind you.

2. *Get outside help.* Again, working teachers, no matter how well intentioned and hard working, cannot set up alone and manage an effective program for improving writing. They need outside help. This means individuals knowledgeable about writing, who themselves write regularly, who know how to teach writing, who are expert in curriculum development, and, importantly, who know how to get teachers—frequently independent and proud individuals—to work together on a major curriculum problem over a long period of time.

Unfortunately, such outside consultants who can do such a job are

scarce, for they jealously guard their time for their own writing and would rather write themselves than take on the difficult task of changing people's guarded attitudes toward teaching writing.

3. *Plan to have the program take at least a year, preferably two.* There must be a regular, long term plan of at least a school year for such a program to be successful. One- or two-hour workshop sessions held at least every other week are a minimum. Selected teachers may first work with the outside consultants, but eventually all teachers who will be responsible for improving writing need to be involved in the workshop gatherings. If the groups are too big, they may be split into smaller groups.

4. *Set up specific goals to be reached by the end of the school year.* If the teachers are given released time, then you have a right to expect them to come up with tangible products at the end of school. Here are some basic goals which might be set for a one-year inservice program.

Basic Goals for a Writing Program

The teachers, with the help of the outside consultant, will

— study, analyze, and discuss the meaning of the latest research, textbooks, and special matters on writing and teaching writing and select the most useful ideas and materials.

— create lessons which exemplify the composing process, try them out with school children, and revise them on the basis of feedback.

— practice using discussion and planning skills and develop guidelines for future interaction.

— outline a program for assessing writing by students and for assessing the writing program for their grade level or for the total school.

— develop a tentative scope and sequence of writing activities for grade levels and for various groupings of students within grade levels.

— devise a tentative list of basic writing competencies for each level and for various groupings of students within grade levels.

But Why Do It?

And a good question, too.

Teaching writing is a hot topic but not a very jazzy one, like the current catch phrases, "disadvantaged" or "gifted and talented"—as if we're not all handicapped in our own fashion and each of us creative in our own way, too.

But if "teaching writing" is not a flashy slogan, it is a topic which gets at what makes people human—the ability to control written language—and when we initiate a scheme to teach writing better we have a chance to help all students—not some special group isolated for quick transfusions of big federal bucks—to learn a top level, human skill, one they can use for the rest of their lives.

So, then, we're at the bottom line: why help people learn how to control written language?

First, kids need to know how to write to get the business of the world done. They need to fill out forms, write business letters, and write papers to persuade and explain. They need to gather information and write reports. The world of commerce, contrary to what the mathematicians and computer whiz bangs say, runs

on the expertly handled written word.

Second, kids need to learn how to write well because writing is an amazingly useful intellectual invention. When we take notes, we remember. When we outline, we see structure. When we write down something, we can look at what we have written and rearrange, recast, and thus reexamine in a strangely critical way what we have written. And as we put into words something initially but dimly perceived, we come to understand our intangible thoughts and feelings.

As an aside, if we don't give all our school children the opportunity to learn to write effectively, we deprive them—in the keenest sense of the word—from becoming productive members of our society. And the gap between those who are *able*—meaning those who can control written language—and those who are *not able*—signifying those to whom written language is an incomprehensible, magical system—will widen and increase the alienation in our land.

Third, kids need to write a lot because in some miraculous way, as they do, they will come to learn about themselves in a way no other medium provides. When we write about our early memories, about descriptions of our secret places, when we recount in writing stories told to us by our loved ones, when we respond in writing to what we read in newspapers and magazines and see in the movies and on TV, we learn in a deeply profound way who we are and begin to perceive, however faintly, the potential we have for becoming.

And finally, although writing is not flashy stuff it can be exciting. Kids need, if for no other reason, to learn to write well so they will not be cheated out of the exhilaration of being able to perform with skill and, possibly even with elegance, the complex, exacting, and intellectually demanding task we call writing.

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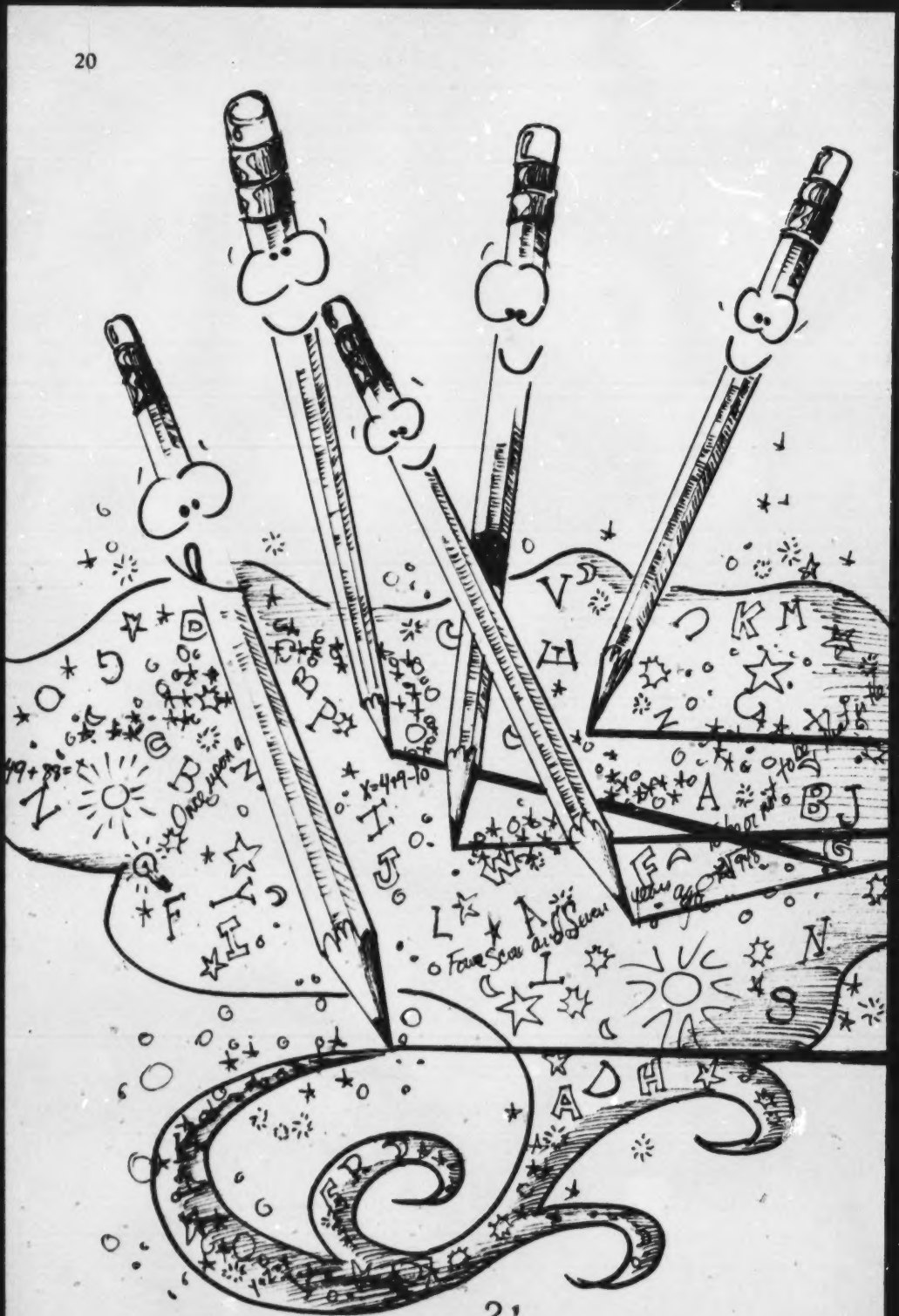

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R. Lauzon

PREPARING THE REMEDIAL STUDENT FOR ESSENTIAL WRITING COMPETENCIES

Nancy Munzert Rabianski

Faced with the advent of the Regents Competency Test in Writing, teachers and administrators are becoming increasingly responsible for providing the best possible aid to those students who experience difficulty in performing common writing tasks. The State Education Department has now mandated that there must be specific remedial aid for those students who did not do well on the 1979 Preliminary Competency Test (PCT). The categories of remediation are: (1) remediation within the general curriculum for those students who scored between 50% and 66% on the PCT (2) individual remediation for those students who scored 49% or lower on the PCT.[1] Such severely disadvantaged student writers need remedial instruction designed to help the individual student writer to develop the writing skills necessary for fulfilling the writing tasks presented on the Regents Competency Test, all of which are meant to reflect the essential writing skills needed in everyday life. In order to provide a remedial student with the necessary instruction, a teacher or administrator must decide what area or areas of remediation are necessary and then decide the type of instruction that will most effectively achieve this remediation. The following discussion will: (1) identify an important area of remediation based upon the forerunners of the Regents Competency Test, that is, the Basic Competency Test and the Preliminary Competency Test and (2) offer some suggestions for remedial instruction based upon current composition research.

Dr. Nancy Munzert Rabianski, as a former English teacher in the Kendall, New York, High School, rated all the Preliminary Competency and the Regents Competency Tests for the students in her school. Dr. Rabianski has published articles in The English Record *and* The English Journal. *She presently teaches composition in the Special Studies Department at Clayton Junior College in Marrow, Georgia.*

An Essential Writing Skill

The previous competency tests in writing skills have required students to fulfill a variety of tasks, some of which have been altered by the State Education Department during the formative years of the competency tests. Even though it has been expedient to make changes in the title and format of the competency tests, on each examination students have consistently been asked to perform the task of giving interrelated ideas in the form of a report, composition, or letter. This aspect of the test will most likely continue to remain in some form because the ability to gather, formulate, and interrelate ideas is indeed essential to effective communication in everyday life. In school, when writing essay or short answer responses, a student must be able to gather or formulate and then interrelate ideas in order to inform a teacher of his or her knowledge of a subject. At home, the same student might need to gather and interrelate some effective ideas in order to persuade his or her father, by

means of a hasty note, that he or she really did need to rush off with the family car. Whether the aim of the task is to inform or to persuade effectively, the student must be able to establish clear, elaborated ideas in an effective pattern.

In the past decade, several studies have indicated that the tagmemic heuristic procedure, which will be discussed later in detail, is useful in helping college students to improve their use of ideas in essays. C. Lee Odell found, for example, that students showed an increase in the evidence used to support statements.[2] In a later study, Richard Young and Frank Koen indicated among their findings that after instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure, student essays showed an increased variety of ideas and were written more clearly and persuasively.[3] This discussion will propose that the tagmemic heuristic procedure is effective in helping not only college students but remedial high school students as well to gather, formulate, and interrelate ideas in written composition.

The following specific suggestions for high school students is based upon a twenty-week study that was conducted with Upstate New York tenth grade students, a portion of whom had difficulty with basic writing skills and, in some cases, had even developed a fear of writing.[4]

Common Characteristics of Remedial Students that Would Warrant the Use of the Tagmemic Heuristic Procedure

There are two somewhat common characteristics of remedial composition students that would suggest that instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure would indeed improve their use of ideas in composition. First, it would not be unusual for a large number of remedial students to have middle IQ scores in the range of 85-100. In the twenty-week study which I conducted, such students, who scored 85-100 on the Otis-Lennon Test of Mental Abilities, demonstrated pre-post essay results that were significantly improved in the gathering, formulating, and elaborating of ideas after instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure in comparison to students with the same 85-100 IQ range who received instruction in free writing. Free writing, which teaches students to gather and interrelate ideas by writing continuously in repeated cycles, seems to be too unstructured to guide students of this ability.

The second somewhat common characteristics of remedial students is low Conceptual Level, a preference for structure in a learning situation. In the twenty-week study, students with a low Conceptual Level (0-1.2) did significantly better after instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure in comparison to the low Conceptual Level students who studied free writing. In order to find out a student's Conceptual Level, it is necessary to pre-test the student by using the Paragraph Completion Test, a test developed by David Hunt, an educational psychologist. The test requires six, timed responses of three sentences each. The topics are ones familiar to adolescents, for example, "rules" and "parents." Within a classroom of remedial students, such a test might be considered by the students to be merely a composition exercise, rather than a psychological test. The test

may be administered within a class period and can be scored, for a fee, by David Hunt's graduate students or, by using the scoring guide and sample responses that David Hunt supplies, the test can be rated by a pair of novice raters who follow a practice rating session of the sort necessary to the reliable holistic scoring of the Regents Competency Test itself. The administration and scoring of the Paragraph Completion Test can be completed in a week, and it might provide useful predictive information if a student does not fall within the middle IQ group. According to the results of the study, a student who has either a low Conceptual Level or a middle IQ is likely to benefit from instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure because of its structured nature. Remedial students will be likely to belong to one or both of the two categories. If a student were not a member of either category, another, less structured approach might be useful.[5]

The Tagmemic Heuristic Procedure: Structured Aid

Since the tagmemic heuristic procedure will be likely to aid many remedial students, it is important to understand the procedure itself as well as the role of the teacher and the student writer in learning and practicing this procedure. The procedure was developed by Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike, who used linguistic theory as the basis for the procedure. According to W. Ross Winterowd, in a review of several modern heuristic procedures, the tagmemic heuristic procedure is the most productive of the new systematic techniques.[6] The procedure is considered systematic because it provides the writer with a series of probes with which to view any unit or units of experience in a variety of ways: (1) units of experience may *contrast* with each other (2) a unit of experience may *change* and yet remain in the same category (3) a unit of experience may be located in a larger *classification* of things (4) units of experience may occur in a *time sequence* (5) units of experience may occur within a significant *physical context* (6) units of experience may be linked by *causality* (7) each unit of experience has a *focus*, a nucleus.[7] This is a simplified explanation of the probes; the italicized terms are the ones used by Lee Odell in the instruction of high school students.[8] Each probe is useful in generating questions about a writing topic. The answers to the questions provide the student writer with a number of related ideas from which he or she can then select ideas to use in the writing task.

The role of the teacher and student in using this procedure might best be explained by outlining sample lesson plans that might be used to help a student to perform the writing tasks given on the 1979 Preliminary Competency Test in Writing.[9] The test does require the student to write a business letter, but since that particular task has by nature a specific format that requires specific information, a discussion of the business letter will be omitted in favor of discussing in some detail a method of instruction that might be used in helping students to complete the composition and report sections of the test.

In the composition section of the test, students are asked to suggest to the principal a way to improve school life and then to give two elaborated reasons that would persuade the principal.[10] Students should first be instructed that they must pre-write before writing the actual paragraph. They then should begin by *focusing* on just one part of school life that needs to be improved: "What specifically needs very much to be changed?" Initially the teacher will have to make up such questions, but with practice, after about five weeks, students should be able to begin, with help, to make up their own questions, and by the end of ten weeks, they will be quite proficient. This first question dealing with focus is, of course, crucial because the student is selecting a topic. If the student responds to the question by saying, "the smoking lounge," this may be used as the grammatical focus of the topic sentence: *The smoking lounge* needs improvement. Providing a partial sentence that has a predicate but needs a subject (the focal point) seems to help a student to understand the concept of focus and the purpose of a topic sentence as well. After a few weeks of practice, students will be able to use *focus* to develop their own topic sentences.

The next step is to use the probes to develop the topic. The most useful probe will be *causality* since this particular probe will provide reasons: "Why does the smoking lounge need to improve?" At this point students may be able to supply two elaborated reasons; if not, other probes may be helpful. For example, *physical context* may generate the question: "Where is the lounge located?" The change probe might be used to ask, "What needs to be changed in the lounge?" *Time sequence* might generate the questions: "When does the lounge open? Are there any periods during the day when it is closed? When does it close for the day?" Some of the above questions will only result in brief answers that need to be elaborated more fully, so the causality probe should sometimes be reapplied: "Why is that an important reason?" After students have answered the questions, they should decide which ideas would most persuade a principal. The two most persuasive reasons should be used in the paragraph to be written. Finally, students need to return to the focus probe in order to write a concluding sentence.

After the paragraph has been written, peers and the teacher should read the resulting paragraphs and respond by using the probes. For example, if the problem with an outdoor smoking lounge is not clear, the reader might respond, "A principal wouldn't really see or feel what's so awful about being outside; cool air sounds refreshing. Give details about the *physical context* that explain the *cause* of the problem."

The report section of the 1979 Preliminary Competency Test in Writing posed a different problem for student writers than did the composition section. In the report section, students were already provided with ideas in the form of notes about a teacher's trip to Egypt, but since the notes were listed randomly, the students needed to reorganize the ideas effectively before writing the actual report. The tagmemic heuristic procedure may also be helpful in this regard because the students in-

terviewed in the twenty week study suggested that the tagmemic heuristic procedure not only helped them to gather ideas but to organize them as well.[11] A portion of the random report notes will be used to demonstrate a way in which the probes may be used to provide a framework for organizing ideas. If a student were to use the probe, *physical context*, for example, he or she might list all of the ideas dealing with physical context such as: "enjoyed ancient temples most," "climbed largest pyramid," and "many interesting historical places."[12] The student could then number the notes, with the most general one listed first and the two details listed under it. *Contrast* is another probe that could be used to organize a portion of the notes: "different ways of travel," "rode in sailboat on the Nile one day," and "rode camel once." The general note, "different ways of travel," would be identified and listed first. Each new category of this sort that was establishing by a probe could be linked to the preceding category with an appropriate transition element such as *in addition*. After all the notes have been organized and linked with transitions, the student should then decide upon the *focus* of the ideas. Since the focus is upon Mr. Fuller's trip to Egypt, this would provide the subject for a topic sentence. Students can usually decide upon the focal point of the notes as soon as they understand that the writer must focus upon a unit of experience just as the eye of a camera focuses upon the chosen part of a scene, closing out irrelevant details. As further practice in omitting irrelevant details, a teacher might add notes that are irrelevant, such as notes about Egypt perhaps that have nothing to do with Mr. Fuller's trip.

Additional Potential Benefits of the Use of the Tagmemic Heuristic Procedure

In addition to improving a student's use of ideas in essays, a teacher who gathers pre-test and post-test data on his or her remedial students may find two more benefits in the use of the tagmemic heuristic procedure. First, in the twenty week study, several low Conceptual Level, middle IQ students who were interviewed commented that they felt that their proofreading had improved. One girl explained that her writing had become so much more interesting that now she wanted to proofread her ideas so that she could make them "even better."[13] Secondly, students who experience such success may also experience a lessening in anxiety about writing. In the twenty week study used as the basis for this discussion, students who were in the low Conceptual Level and middle IQ groups and received the tagmemic heuristic procedure as instruction tended to show a decrease in anxiety following instruction. The pre-post test that may be used to measure anxiety is the Daly-Miller Test of Writing Apprehension. This is a simple Likert-type scale that is easy to administer and score. Students simply indicate on a scale of *1-5* the strength of their agreement or disagreement with such statements as "Handing in a composition makes me feel good."[14] If students do show improvement in anxiety, this in itself is important because Daly and Miller found in their research that anxious writers not only may produce less

adept writing they may also become so fearful of writing that they choose careers that allow them to avoid writing.[15] Writing anxiety may have a negative effect not only on a person's writing, but also his or her life in general.

Conclusion

A number of remedial students have middle IQ scores (85-100) or low Conceptual Levels (0-1.2). According to quantifiable data in a recent study, such students will be likely to gather and formulate a greater number and a greater variety of ideas after instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure. These successful students will also be likely to show a trend toward lessened writing anxiety. Student interviews in the study further suggested that writers might also begin to organize and proofread better after instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure. In general, remedial students who receive instruction in the tagmemic heuristic procedure are likely to become better prepared for the writing tasks that will be presented on the Regents Competency Test in Writing and, consequently, better prepared for life as well.

FOOTNOTES

[1] "New York State Preliminary Test in Writing: Manual for Administrators and Teachers (Albany, New York: New York State Education Department, 1979), p. 3.

[2] Camillus Lee Odell, "Discovery Procedures for Contemporary Rhetoric: A Study of the Usefulness of the Tagmemic Heuristic Model in Teaching Composition" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1970), p. 78.

[3] Richard Young and Frank Koen, *The Tagmemic Discovery Procedure: An Evaluation of the Uses in the Teaching of Rhetoric* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1973), pp. 47-48.

[4] Nancyanne Rabianski, "An Exploratory Study of Individual Differences in the Use of Free Writing and the Tagmemic Heuristic Procedure, Two Modes of Invention in the Composing Process" (Ph.D. dissertation, S.U.N.Y. at Buffalo, 1979), pp. 200-206.

[5] Ibid., pp. 196-206.

[6] W. Ross Winterowd, "Topics and Levels in the Composing Process," in *Rhetoric and Composition*, ed. Richard Graves (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, 1976), p. 319.

[7] Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1970), p. 127.

[8] Lee Odell and Joanne Cohick, "You Mean Write It Over in Ink?" *English Journal* 64 (1975): 48-53.

[9] "New York State Preliminary Test in Writing" (Albany, New York: New York State Education Department, 1979).

[10] Ibid., p. 4.

[11] Rabianski, p. 200.

[12] Ibid., p. 3.

[13] Ibid., p. 200.

[14] John Daly and Michael Miller, "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension," *Research in the Teaching of English* 9 (1975): 246.

[15] Ibid., pp. 242-249.

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SETTING UP A TUTORIAL PLACE FOR BASIC WRITING SKILLS

Gladdys W. Church

With the nation-wide concern over the "basic skills crisis," administrators and faculty alike are anxious to find effective means for reversing the trend. New York's Basic Competency Tests are but a symptom of this concern. But the cure for ineffective writing is elusive. Certainly some restructuring of classroom curriculum is indicated, but it will be necessary to augment classroom practices with appropriate assistance that extends beyond the classroom.

One of the major solutions to the crisis in writing is to set up a tutoring place for basic writing skills. This is presently being done at the college level and is beginning to be implemented in high schools. Although individual writing places will vary to meet the needs of the particular clientele, they usually have several aspects in common.

Mrs. Gladdys W. Church, Director of the Learning Center at the State University of New York College at Brockport, is editor of the College Learning Skills Association Newsletter and Program Chairman for the 1980 Developmental and Remedial Education Symposium on "Learning Skills in Secondary and College Education" to be held in Rochester, April 20-22.

Common Aspects of Writing Places

First, the instruction is one-to-one and is provided by trained staff — both faculty and peer tutors. Secondly, a writing place usually provides diagnosis of a student's writing abilities based on his actual performance rather than on objective tests. After we receive this information, we can provide the appropriate skills development as well as assistance in preparing actual assignments. Schools are careful to avoid using assignments in the writing place as punishments or as a treatment aimed solely at the unskilled writer. This is usually avoided by emphasizing the tangible benefits of improving from a "D" to a "C" or from a "B" to an "A." A competent record keeping system is maintained in a writing place to aid in both individual as well as program evaluation. Usually individual folders are established for frequent users while record cards are used for those seeking infrequent assistance. The records usually indicate skills weaknesses, work planned to overcome the weaknesses, the number of contacts and the length of each one, the major areas emphasized each time, and the progress made. A writing place does not need a lot of hardware, but it should be housed in a separate, fairly attractive location with several dictionaries, thesauruses, and basic handbooks as well as some workbooks in sentence combining and basic writing skills. The hours of operation reflect typical student usage so that in high schools writing places

are optimally open before and after school, during all study halls, and during the lunch hours, while in colleges they most often operate weekday afternoons and evenings. At peak periods during the day or during the semester schedule (i.e. during lunch hours and before midterms) the writing place has additional tutors available for all who seek help. While writing places might have some students who are required to attend, most encourage students to take advantage of the service voluntarily.

Advantages of a Writing Place

Those persons interested in convincing administrators or faculty members that a writing place is desirable for their school will find that the following advantages justify their arguments for its inclusion within the school program.

Advantages of a Writing Place

1. The advent of broad scale competency based testing has highlighted the fact that students' writing skills develop in different ways at different times. Thus, it is impossible for regular classroom teachers to provide all the developmental support required by students since some students will already be functioning ahead of the classroom pace while others will be somewhat behind. A tutoring place for writing can be used to assist the writing development of the late bloomers while it can also be used to provide the spice and challenge for students already functioning beyond the basic skills level. (These competent writers may become tutors or use the writing place for advanced assignments.)
2. The diagnostic basis of a tutorial writing center allows educators to identify the best procedure(s) for assisting individual students to improve their basic writing skills. Being able to individualize instruction promotes a greater opportunity for significant development of the writing skills since students' strengths are used to correct their weaknesses.
3. The one-to-one relationships which are the heart of the tutorial writing center, are significant in fostering the climate of trust and confidence necessary for successful writing. If a student writing at the basic level feels threatened in the learning situation, then he creates a barrier which prevents him from ever seeing the true potential of written communication. The nature of the tutorial experience counteracts this by providing appropriate feedback for both encouragement and direction.
4. The flexibility of a writing place means students can come at irregular times, for specific problems or general ones, and they can be referred by teachers from areas other than just English.
5. The next advantage, in fact, is that such a resource represents a useful aid to content area teachers who, because of this service, can be attentive to the basic writing problems of their students without having to turn their classes into writing classes.
6. Obviously then, the sixth advantage is that the writing place

offers an organized manner of providing additional writing support, instead of placing the burden upon teachers to undertake individually what skills work they feel they have time for.

7. In fact, the seventh advantage lies in the increased dialogue which teachers will share as they cooperatively use the writing place to improve students' writing skills. Their increased awareness enriches their classroom work for they are better able to support the value of the writing process.

8. Of course, the major advantage is to students. Often, for the first time, students will have the experience of understanding what writing is all about and of making it an important activity they can learn to control. When students are helped along to a point where they realize that the writing process is not some mysterious event at which only the chosen can be successful, then they are on their way to a true appreciation which should allow them continuing satisfaction whenever they engage in written communication.

The Writing Place at Brockport: A Model

After much investigation of current research and discussion, the staff of the Learning Skills Center at the State University of New York, College at Brockport established their Writing Place in the fall of 1978. Brockport's Writing Place provides students throughout their college experience with an opportunity to develop and improve upon their basic skills. Although obvious differences exist between high school and college staffing and financing needs, an examination of how Brockport's Writing Place was created and presently functions can serve as a starting point for planning a similar service in secondary schools.

Who Should Tutor

First, we had to decide for whom we intended to provide writing support. After surveying students who were already using Learning Skills, we decided against limiting the service to just the academically deficient student since we recognized that students at whatever level of preparation can and do benefit from competent writing support. That meant that we needed to prepare a staff of tutors who would be effective in dealing with students from the freshman through graduate levels. We believed that the tutors should be fairly proficient writers themselves and that they should be interested in all aspects of the writing process. In addition, we decided that they should be interested in learning how to establish comfortable one-to-one relationships. We found that advanced students as well as present faculty members (from Learning Skills, English, or content areas) could serve as tutors, but before they could work with students, we insisted they share a common training program. (Interested and qualified students may receive college credit for their tutoring experience, though not all who become involved take advantage of that option.) Students who wish to become tutors submit samples of their writing, are interviewed by the Director of Learning Skills and the Writing Place coordinator as well as

by the sponsoring professor from an academic area, and demonstrate a high enough grade point average so that the experience will not likely jeopardize their own academic success.

Tutor Training Program

Before we could identify the appropriate training for tutors, we needed to clarify further the nature of the service which we intended to provide. Since the College offers several courses in writing beyond the English Composition level, and since the Learning Skills Center also offers courses in writing for no credit, we decided that we did not want the Writing Place to be simply another "class," but rather we envisioned a place where students could receive one-to-one assistance with the actual writing needs they were encountering as a result of their course work. Thus, we decided that the training of the staff should be such that they would be prepared to deal on an individual basis with a student's writing needs, whatever they might be.

Conferencing—The Method of Choice

After investigating current approaches to teaching writing on a one-to-one basis, we decided that the "conferencing" method of tutoring would most nearly accomplish our goal of providing individual support, regardless of a writer's needs. This particular technique is eclectic and is based upon the writings of Donald Murray, Roger Garrison, Donald Ross, Charles Cooper, Charles Duke, Rosemarie Arbur, and others (see bibliography). Most recently, the "conferencing" method has been put into practice at the University of Buffalo's Learning Center under the direction of Ann Matsuhashi, Charles Cooper, and Lee Odell. The generalized procedure was modified by Robert Blake and Gladdys Church as the basis of tutoring in the Brockport Writing Place. Essentially, tutors using this method encourage students to improve their writing through all stages of the writing process rather than emphasize "correctness" in a finished product.

The Writing Process—The Knowledge Basis of Conferencing

There is general agreement that to produce a successful piece of writing the writer normally needs to work through four basic stages. The first stage is generally referred to as the "pre-writing" stage and is either a conscioous or unconscious period before the actual writing during which the successful writer examines or considers the given or chosen writing task. Some writers mentally explore the various aspects which need consideration (the audience, the persona, and the content to be included), while others jot down ideas, talk about the subject with a friend, read related information, or use other techniques to discover what they think about the task.

Next, writers move into the first draft stage. At this point they continue to explore the task, but in writing. Some writers just start writing and let it flow, not worrying about form or mechanics since their purpose is just to generate enough material to begin working and shaping. Others will create some sort of an outline and then generate a draft. Successful writers know that which-

ever way they proceed, they are only creating a stockpile of material from which to shape the actual piece of writing. Most inexperienced writers, however, consider that when they have accomplished this first draft, they are through except for brief attention to correcting the mechanics. Since most high school and college students are inexperienced writers, it is no wonder that the writing they submit as finished products so often seems to be incomplete.

The next phase of the writing process and indeed the most time consuming part, the revision stage, is the one experienced writers use to give true shape to their work. They focus on clarifying and elaborating ideas in view of the audience's needs, their own persona (voice), and the task's requirements. They also ensure that their chosen order will guide the audience's reception of their message, and they ultimately concern themselves with the specifics of appropriate word choices and sentence emphasis. Two, three, ten, or more new drafts may be produced at this stage. Inexperienced writers need to learn to work on this stage of the writing process and to acquire specific techniques for honing down their rough draft. They must be freed from the idea that competent writers simply put pen to paper and create a finished product in a single step.

In fact, after revising, experienced writers then work through the fourth or editing and proofreading stage. Here the writer focuses upon syntax, specific word choices, mechanics, punctuation, spelling, and so forth. Then he writes up clean copy which he proofreads for any undetected errors.

Thus, to ensure that all our tutors have this common understanding of the writing process, several readings from the attached bibliography are assigned, and after much discussion each tutor writes up his own perception of how he works through the writing process which he addresses to the audience of the whole group.

Rhetorical Concerns

Another major focus in staff training is on the rhetorical concerns generated by the discourse mode, intended audience, writer's persona, and the specific task to be accomplished. We examine current readings on discourse mode (see bibliography) for insight as to the relative emphasis of audience, persona, and task (subject) in each. It is necessary for tutors to be aware of the requirements of each discourse mode if they are to be successful in providing appropriate assistance to students working in them.

Problems and Errors

From this basic awareness of the writing process and the rhetorical constraints we next train the tutors to identify the major problems or errors which face the writer at a given stage of the writing process. "Problems" are defined as difficulties which arise from the writer's uncertainty about purpose, audience, or persona, and they are predominant concerns during the generation of ideas, selection and organization of materials, first draft stage and sometimes during early revisions. Problems are directly related to the discourse mode chosen or assigned. "Errors" as defined by Mina Shaughnessy are "unintentional and

unprofitable intrusions upon the consciousness of the reader"[1] such as those of syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. As such, they deserve most attention during the last stages of the writing process: revising a final draft, editing, and proofreading. The distinction between problems and errors is crucial to the method of conferencing. When working on an actual assignment, it is important for problems to be the focus of the tutor's assistance during the first three stages of the writing process since attention to errors would sidetrack the student into frustrating corrections which interfere with the development of the larger rhetorical concerns. This does not mean that intrusive and disruptive errors go unacknowledged at the early stages, but that the attention which is paid to them does not eclipse the process of focusing upon remedying the problems which if not attended to would cause the piece of writing to fail no matter how "correct" the copy.

To determine the major problem a writer is having in the early stages of the writing process, the conferencer (tutor) must assess the student's awareness of his purpose, audience and persona (point of view) as they relate to his discourse mode. The conferencer should always ask the student to state his perception of the writing task and his understanding of his audience and persona. For instance, if the student is writing an informative piece which describes an object or place to an audience of peers who are not familiar with that subject, his major problem might lie in his selection of inappropriate details presented in a random manner. His problem is attributable to his lack of audience awareness since he is not choosing details that will allow an audience unfamiliar with his experience to visualize the scene sufficiently. In addition, he has not used a clear organizational pattern to allow his audience to develop a logical mental image of the situation.

One student, in describing a meadow scene near his home, might first talk about the creek, then the trees, the bushes and flowers, and then the pile of stones. If he doesn't use spatial order and relative distance and specific names (i.e. oaks, hawthornes, daisies, granite), his audience unfamiliar with the scene, will not be able to build up an image similar enough to the stimulus in the writer's mind for the communication act to be effective. It is not that the student can't write. The crux of the matter lies in the fact that he did not consider his audience's needs and then use them to guide his selection of details and order. Thus, the student's lack of audience awareness undermines his efforts in accomplishing his purpose, and there is no sense in a tutor's focusing on errors at this stage since the primary function of the student's piece of writing would still not be accomplished, even if it were grammatically correct. In this case the conferencer should lead the writer to an awareness of what is missing by asking questions which would force the writer to supply verbally the missing information in a logical order and thereby discover the problem for himself. The answers to the questions would provide the means for resolving the problem.

Tutor Training Activities

In addition to reading and discussing the issues cited above, we

also have tutors view video tapes of actual conferences and then discuss the different strategies represented in relationship to our model of conferencing.[8] Also, we provide opportunities for tutors to simulate the conference situation through role playing a "dummy" conference with an actual piece of student writing. These simulations are also videotaped and then can be analyzed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the tutors' techniques.

Another element of the training program is the keeping of a selective journal which the individual tutors use to record their reactions to particular conferences and which serves as a log of the growth of their techniques and accomplishments. Past journals are then made available to new tutors along with some of the actual writings which were the result of the conferences. By studying these, new tutors have a bird's eye view of the dynamics of the tutor-writer relationship.

We have found that intensive training of from four to six hours a week at the beginning of the semester and then ongoing weekly sessions of about an hour each provide an appropriate framework for training our tutors. The weekly sessions continue to focus on various aspects of the writing process as well as serve as a time to share problems and solutions.

Learning to Talk to a Writer

One important aspect of tutor training is to develop effective ways of talking to writers. Nothing is as naked as a thought shared in writing, and so it is essential for tutors to understand the writer's vulnerability and to be able to develop a comfortable working relationship with their tutees. Emphasis is placed upon developing strategies for directing improvement while avoiding criticism that causes the writer to retreat. One of last year's student tutors, developed a marvelous approach. He would refer to a particular part of the student's writing and say, "Boy, you just missed a beautiful chance to . . ." In addition, our tutors read Blake's articles "Guidelines for Encouraging Growth in Writing" and "How to Talk to a Writer, or Forward to Fundamentals in Teaching Writing." These articles contain invaluable examples of appropriate supportive approaches for each stage of the writing process.

Accomplishments

Because all tutors receive common training and use the same approach, students can drop into the Writing Place several different times while working on a particular assignment, and even if they work with a different tutor each time, they are not thrown off. The progress on the piece of work is steady because of the hierarchical nature of the conferencing approach. In addition, this approach fosters a genuine awareness of the nature of the writing process, and it encourages students to pay attention to working through each of the stages, rather than stopping after a rough draft. Students react positively to this approach since each session produces concrete, tangible improvements in a supportive atmosphere. Students learn the techniques effective writers use in creating a finished piece and after each session take away a strategy they can employ on their own in a similar writing context.

The focus of the tutoring sessions is on fostering independence which in turn inspires confidence and frees the student to become actively engaged in the writing process. When the student begins to articulate his own sense of the writing process, a tutor knows that a significant threshold has been reached. No longer is the student subservient to forces beyond his control but is dynamically directing the power of written communication.

Evaluation of the Program

Evaluation is as important as the operation of the program, for in these days of tight money, accountability is crucial. At Brockport, we evaluate by describing change in student performance rather than by tests of significance since this is not a research design and, therefore, no control group has been identified.

Individual

Students who attend on a fairly regular basis have their first and last two writing products evaluated with a dichotomous scale (developed by the author) which describes seven separate categories: purpose, organization, content, vocabulary/diction, sentence usage, mechanics and grammar. The yes/no response to each subpoint (four for each) provides initial diagnostic information and allows for description of change in performance when post samples are compared to the pre samples. A primary advantage of having an evaluation scale is that it can be used as a writing guide by students who check their completed pieces of writing against it or even use it at the rough draft and revision stage to suggest areas of improvement.

In addition, a writing place record card is filled out each time a student attends, even if he or she is returning to work on the same piece of writing. This is valuable because at each contact he is at another point in the writing process, and so the perception of the problem, the strategies used, and the progress made will always represent a separate entity. When an individual's cards for the same piece of writing are examined, the overall progress becomes clear. The folders kept on students who frequently use the Writing Place contain more elaborate data about the nature of each session such as work assigned, reactions, and successes. In addition, students who attend regularly are asked to fill out the Writer's Perception Questionnaire early in their attendance and again at the end. This Likert-type instrument (also developed by the author) was designed to record students' own perceptions about their strategies for writing in relationship to the writing process and to reveal their expectations of themselves as writers. Tutors gain useful information which they can then draw on in planning writing strategies.

Program

Other data used in the program evaluation come from the tutoring log (daily tally sheet) and from the general categories on the record card such as: length of time of the session, number of previous contacts on the same assignment, the way student found out about the service, class the assignment is for, student's grade level, and specific type of assistance sought. At the end of the

first semester of operation we found that 339 students had used the service for an average of 30-60 minutes per contact. Most students arrived at the Writing Place through the self-referral process after hearing about the service from a friend. The majority of the students using the service were freshmen and sophomores, while the majority of the assignments were from English classes, although a variety of other departments were represented (History, Psychology, Sociology, Theatre, Anthropology, and others).

During the first seven weeks of operation in the fall of 1979, the Writing Place tutors provided assistance to 304 students, almost double the number who had been seen during the entire first semester of operation (Spring, 1979). The number of students who returned two or more times to work on a piece of writing also sharply increased which reflects the students' emerging awareness of the stages of the writing process. Since all attendance is voluntary, this data makes a very positive statement about the value students attach to such a service.

Tutors are much less concerned with formal evaluation data than they are with the evidence provided by a beaming student who reports "I got a 'B.' I never got a 'B' on a paper in my life." Tutors have come to training sessions bursting with pleasure because "John came back today with such a good paragraph that I just know he's made the breakthrough." The fact that students are often waiting in line a few minutes before the Writing Place opens is further evidence for the tutors that their efforts are needed and appreciated.

Conclusion

Should high schools and colleges set up writing places?

Our experience at Brockport tells us "yes." The development of writing skills is an ongoing process that requires more time and focus for many students than regular classroom instruction can provide. A writing place can be a significant and highly visible part of any school's writing program. If faculty and administrators encourage students' use of the writing place, then students seem very willing to take advantage of the opportunity to improve their writing skills in a supportive and individualized setting.

[1] Shaughnessy, Mina, p. 12 (information for notes is in the bibliography).

[2] Presented in outline form in "The Conferencing Process" adopted from SUNY Buffalo's materials.

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JOHNNY LEARNS WHAT WE TEACH HIM

Cecelia M. Kingston

When in 1977, *Newsweek* boldly proclaimed, "Johnny can't write," a shocked public turned to us — the educators — and angrily demanded "Why can't Johnny write?" But we — did not answer! We could not answer! We did not know!

Historically charged with the responsibility of teaching Johnny how to write, we suddenly found ourselves unable to refute the claim that Johnny could not write. We, intimately involved in the teaching of writing, were chagrined to find ourselves acknowledging that we could not understand why Johnny was not learning how to write. Repeatedly frustrated by Johnny's poor performance in writing, we found ourselves beginning to look beyond the classroom for reasons to explain Johnny's failure. But, the public would not let us forget that it was our responsibility to teach Johnny, that it was we who were accountable, that it was we who had promised to teach him how to write. "Why can't Johnny write?" they persisted. Is not our educational system based on the premise that if a teacher teaches, the student learns?" they queried.

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William James once said, "Where there is a contradiction, a distinction must be made." In truth, if we are teaching children how to write, should they not be learning how to write?

Perhaps the distinction that may explain the contradiction will be found buried in the way we teach writing. Is there a correlation between that which we teach and that which we measure in writing?

Several years ago, when the first New York State Basic Competency Test in Writing was administered to eighth and ninth graders, I reviewed all of the test papers which had been graded 75 or below by the raters. The test, designed to measure minimal writing skills on a sixth grade level, was divided into three parts. Part I asked the students to answer a number of objective-type short-answer questions on mechanics; Part II asked the students to generate twenty sentences from twenty words or phrases; and Part III asked the students to write two paragraphs, neither more than five sentences long.

The review revealed data, both extremely interesting and potentially meaningful. Invariably, the students did well on Part I. Even the weakest student seemed to be able to spell it's, to capitalize proper nouns, to use the correct verb form.

Invariably, the students did well on Part II. Few were the students who lost more than ten points out of forty. No student failed to begin a

sentence with a capital; few students forgot end punctuation marks; almost all students wrote coherent sentences; and only on occasion were words left out or wrong word choices made. More frequently, however, there were spelling errors and improper use of prepositions. Most of the sentences were simple sentences with declarative sentences prevailing. The absence of subordinate clauses and varied sentence patterns was noteworthy.

However, the results of Part III were significantly and dramatically inferior to those of Part I and II. The same student who in Part II began every sentence with a capital suddenly did not capitalize any words. While in Part II, the student consistently used correct end punctuation marks, in Part III, the students used punctuation marks haphazardly — if at all. While in Parts I and II, the student spelled simple words correctly, in Part III, he or she misspelled almost every other word. Sentences in Part III lacked coherence, fluency, clarity. Paragraphs lacked cohesiveness. The content lacked depth and reflected neither logical thought nor sequential thought. Even the handwriting which had in Part II been legible — if not extraordinarily neat — was messy, illegible, and even nondecipherable in Part III.

The systematic review of these papers has compelled me to ask a number of questions:

(1) Why does a student write twenty sentences in isolation relatively well and then write five sentences on one topic so poorly?

(2) Why does a student's content, style, and mechanical accuracy deteriorate when he is asked to write more than one sentence about a topic?

(3) Why is a student more eloquent when he does not have to develop an idea beyond one sentence?

(4) Why does a student who gives evidence of being able to follow directions in Part I and Part II of a writing test, give evidence of not even having understood the task in Part III?

(5) Why does a student capable of writing individual sentences not demonstrate an ability to write simple paragraphs?

(6) Why does a student who spells *it's*, for instance, correctly in Part I, fail to spell *it's* correctly when he uses it in a paragraph?

In an attempt to answer the questions, I found myself noting the following:

(1) More of the students examined received the highest number of points on Part I rather than on Part II or III.

(2) Every student received more credit for Parts I and II than for Part III.

(3) Questions in Part I were exclusively objective; in Part II, semi-objective, and in Part III, totally subjective.

(4) Part I depends on simple recall skills; Part II depends on recall skills and knowledge of testing patterns; and Part III depends on clear, sustained thinking and the ability to create complete compositions.

Suddenly, it became obvious that whenever a student was asked to think through a topic, he appeared

to forget all the acquired civilities and amenties, the "do's" and "dont's" of written expression.

For a moment, let us return to how we teach writing. What teacher has not at some time meticulously incorporated the following: (1) grammar exercises — a series of sentences for which students are asked to select the correct verb form, or preposition, or part of speech, (2) spelling lists and spelling tests — usually of the 100 most commonly misspelled words, (3) vocabulary words usually not listed which must be defined in context, (4) vocabulary words which must be used in original individual sentences, (5) drills in locating the topic sentence in carefully constructed workbook paragraphs, (6) grammar book sentences to be corrected by adding punctuation marks, (7) sentences to be corrected by having the student underlining the correct usage, (8) a number of tests on principles of grammar (underline the correct form in each sentence).

When a teacher has finished giving drills, practice exercises, and grammar tests, as well as vocabulary tests, and spelling tests, he or she usually assigns a composition to be written in class. The composition is normally corrected for grammatical errors only. Rarely does a teacher brainstorm ideas, stress the prewriting activities, encourage revision, and help students develop editing skills.

If the instruction in writing, concerns itself primarily with the study of grammar; if the writing activities are non-sequential and fragmented; if the focus in writing is primarily on the individual sentence, on the correct spelling of a word, and on the memorizing of new vocabulary words, then how can we wonder why Johnny did so much better on Part I and Part II of the RCT's than on Part III. Where in our writing program do we take time to stimulate thinking and develop thinking skills? Where in our instruction do we help the students transfer their knowledge of grammatical principles and punctuation rules to their writing? When do we ask students to develop ideas and to organize data more effectively? When do we help a student try to communicate an important message through writing?

Is it possible that Johnny cannot write because we do not teach him to write? Is it possible that Johnny has indeed learned what we teach him? Do not the RCT's suggest that Johnny has learned to select the correct grammatical form, to punctuate simple sentences, to capitalize certain words, to choose the right tense? Do not the results of the RCT's indicate that Johnny can generate a simple sentence? But, is that writing?

Obviously, while we continue to teach Johnny isolated writing skills, we continue to judge Johnny by his ability to integrate the skills into a well-constructed paragraph, in which an idea is developed, a point is sustained. And that is where the distinction must be made to resolve the contradiction.

The time has come to admit that it is true that Johnny learns what we teach him, that it is true that Johnny cannot write because we do not teach him to write. We teach Johnny how to write simple sentences — individual sentences — related neither to a specific topic nor to a specific place nor to a specific person. We teach him to write short sentences that begin with a capital letter and end with a punctuation

mark. Johnny has proven that he has learned what we have taught him. Johnny can write simple sentences which are properly punctuated and grammatically accurate.

If we want Johnny to generate more than simple sentences, carefully punctuated and clearly expressed, then we will have to teach him to write.

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